

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY BERN

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TAGS: ELAB, XT, EEC

SUBJECT: FRENCH CGT REQUESTS ETUC MEMBERSHIP TALKS

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1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE SECRETARIAT OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ETUC) HAS RECEIVED AN OFFICIAL REQUEST FROM THE COMMUNIST CGT OF FRANCE TO BEGIN TALKS AIMED AT EVENTUAL CGT MEMBERSHIP IN THE ETUC. THE REQUEST WILL BE REFERRED TO AN ETUC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING ON OCTOBER 25. ETUC SECRETARIAT OFFICIALS, WHO ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO THE INITIATION OF TALKS, ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE CGT REQUEST WILL BE REJECTED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE FRENCH CGT HAS TAKEN THE FIRST STEP IN ITS LONG-EXPECTED BID FOR ETUC MEMBERSHIP. IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO ETUC SECRETARY GENERAL RASSCHAERT EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE CGT OFFICIALLY REQUESTED THAT THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS BEGIN TO DISCUSS CONDITIONS OF AFFILIATION. RASSCHAERT HAS INFORMED US THAT THE FRENCH REQUEST WILL BE SUBMITTED BY THE SECRETARIAT TO THE ETUC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON OCTOBER 25 ALONG WITH A STRONG SECRETARIAT RECOMMENDATION FOR A FLAT REJECTION.

3. RASSCHAERT IS CERTAIN THAT THE FRENCH PROPOSAL WILL BE GIVEN SHORT SHRIFT BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. HE SAID THAT THE GERMAN DGB IS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO CGT ADMISSION AND SHARES THE SECRETARIAT'S VIEW THAT THE VERY ACT OF BEGINNING TALKS WOULD SIGNIFY THE ETUC'S EVENTUAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE CGT'S AFFILIATION. RASSCHAERT TOLD US THAT THE GERMANS "ACCEPTED TO BE OUT-VOTED" WHEN THE COMMUNIST CONTROLLED ITALIAN CGIL WAS ADMITTED TO THE ETUC LAST APRIL, BUT THAT THE DGB IS NOT ABOUT TO CAVE IN ON THE QUESTION OF CGT MEMBERSHIP OR ON EVEN THE INITIATION OF TALKS.

4. RASSCHAERT ALSO SAID THAT THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE CGIL AND CGT ARE SO GLARING, IN TERMS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE SOVIETS, THAT MANY OF THOSE WHO VOTED IN FAVOR OF CGIL ADMISSION EARLIER THIS YEAR WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY IN SUPPORTING THE CGT'S MEMBERSHIP BID. ANOTHER FACTOR, HE SAID, WHICH MILITATES AGAINST APPROVAL OF THE CGT'S REQUEST, IS THAT THE CGT, UNLIKE THE CGIL WHICH HAD THE BACKING OF THE ITALIAN CISL AND UIL, DOES NOT HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE TWO DEMOCRATIC LABOR CENTRALS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN FRANCE. THE FO WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY WITHDRAW FROM THE ETUC IF TALKS WERE INITIATED AND RASSCHAERT IS CONVINCED THAT THE CFET, AS A NEW MEMBER OF THE ETUC, WILL NOT BE PREPARED TO SUPPORT THE CGT REQUEST AT THIS TIME.

5. WHEN WE ASKED RASSCHAERT FOR HIS PROGNOSTICATION ABOUT WHAT POSITION THE BRITISH TUC MIGHT ADOPT ON THE QUESTION OF CGT TALKS, HE SUGGESTED THAT THE BRITISH ARE SO BOGGED

DOWN WITH INTERNAL PROBLEMS THAT THEY MAY NOT BE PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO TACKLE THE GERMANS ON THIS ISSUE AT THIS TIME. HE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT A LABOR PARTY VICTORY IN OCTOBER COULD LEAD TO BRITAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EC AND THIS COULD WELL HAVE A SERIOUS EFFECT ON THE FUTURE OF THE ETUC. ACCORDING TO RASSCHAERT WHERE IS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE SENTIMENT AMONG CONTINENTAL EUROPEAN TRADE UNION LEADERS FOR REORGANIZING THE ETUC ALONG EC LINES IF THE BRITISH LEAVE THE EC. ACCORDING TO RASSCHAERT, THE BRITISH TUC'S OPPOSITION TO THE EC AND ITS CONTINUED REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN EC INSTITUTIONS HAS ANGERED CONTINENTAL EUROPEAN LEADERS, PARTICULARLY THE GERMANS. HE SAID THAT THESE LEADERS NOW DEEPLY REGRET EXTENDING ETUC MEMBERSHIP TO UNIONS IN NON EC COUNTRIES WHICH ARE BEING USED BY THE BRITISH IN FOMENTING OPPOSITION TO THE EC.

6. ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH IS CAUSING FRICTION BETWEEN THE TUC AND DGB IS THE GROWING GERMAN CONVICTION THAT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN THE TUC IS GREATER THAN THE BRITISH ARE WILLING TO ADMIT. RASSCHAERT BELIEVES THAT THIS, COUPLED WITH THE TUC'S CONTINUED BOYCOTT OF EC INSTITUTIONS, HAS TEMPERED THE GERMAN POSITION AGAINST ANY NEW EXPANSION OF THE ETUC AND THAT THIS COULD HAVE A DIRECT BEARING ON THE QUESTION OF CGT TALKS.

7. COMMENT: RASSCHAERT'S ASSESSMENT OF GERMAN DGB POSTURE VIS-A-VIS CGT MEMBERSHIP IN THE ETUC IS UNDOUBTEDLY ACCURATE. HOWEVER, HIS VIEWS ABOUT THE BRITISH TUC, PARTICULARLY HIS REFERENCE TO ITS LIMITED CAPACITY TO EXERCISE ITS FORMIDABLE INFLUENCE WITHIN THE ETUC SMACKS MORE OF WISHFUL THINKING. RASSCHAERT AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ETUC GENERAL SECRETARY IS IN A POSITION TO JUDGE, BUT WE NONETHELESS QUESTION HIS ANALYSIS ON THIS POINT BECAUSE THE BRITISH NOT ONLY REPRESENT 30 PERCENT OF THE ETUC'S TOTAL MEMBERSHIP, BUT ENJOY CONSIDERABLY MORE SUPPORT AMONG OTHER ETUC AFFILIATES THAN DO THE GERMANS. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT AN EC SECTOR OR SUB-COMMISSION TO DEAL WITH EC MATTERS COULD BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE ETUC, BUT IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT THE ETUC WILL BECOME UNGLUED AS A RESULT OF THE PENDING CGT CONTROVERSY OR BECAUSE OF THE SPLIT BETWEEN EC AND NON-EC UNIONS.

8. NEVERTHELESS, PROSPECTS FOR AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECISION TO INITIATE TALKS WITH THE CGT WOULD SEEM SLIGHT. IT WOULD REQUIRE A TWO-THIRDS VOTE FOR

APPROVAL. WHILE THIS WAS EASILY ACHIEVED IN THE CASE OF THE CGIL, THAT VOTING PATTERN WOULD NOT HOLD UP IF THE CGT ISSUE DOES COME TO A VOTE. IF THE BRITISH DO DECIDE TO PRESS THE ISSUE, THEY COULD PROBABLY COUNT ON SUPPORT FROM THE BELGIAN FGTB, CERTAIN SCANDINAVIAN AND A FEW OF THE CHRISTIAN UNIONS, BUT THIS WOULD PROBABLY FALL CONSIDERABLY SHORT OF THE REQUIRED TWO-THIRDS. IN ANY EVENT THE CGT HAS OFFICIALLY PUT THE BALL INTO PLAY AND AN INITIAL REJECTION IS NOT APT TO SIGNAL THE END OF THE GAME. GREENWALD

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